Christopher Perez interviewed by Jaime Lopez

Jaime: [inaudible 00:00:02]

Chris I'll give you a little synopsis of what this interview is about. On the job when you talk to electricians, journeymen and journey women, you have conversations with them and you get to know them on a certain level. They [00:00:30] give you advice and talk about different things and you share stories and tips and tricks of the trade. What happens is when you get disconnected from those people those stories get lost, and this is paying respect to that or what it is that we share on the job site in this type of recording. So I'm just gonna ask you some simple questions and you can go ahead and start by telling us your name and your job title.

Christopher P.: My name [00:01:00] is Christopher Perez, and right now I'm a MIJ. I just turned

MIJ.

Jaime: So, the people who are going to be listening to this may be electricians, they

may not be, so when you explain certain things, just try to explain what it is that

a MIJ is. In your own words.

Christopher P.: Okay. I just turned from apprentice, and that is like a year and a half that I have

to do like [00:01:30] a [inaudible 00:01:30], like the medics do, they, I forgot

how they call them.

Jaime: In Spanish it's [inaudible 00:01:40].

Christopher P.: [inaudible 00:01:41] yeah.

Jaime: Explain what that is, and when a medic does that. What he does.

Christopher P.: Well he got to basically be a medic but without making the money that a real

medic makes. So [00:02:00] that's basically, I have to do a journeyman work but

I'm not making what a journeyman makes.

Jaime: Why is it that they do that with medics?

Christopher P.: I guess to test them, or give them the opportunity to see, okay this is what you

have to deal with, before they start making the big bucks.

Jaime: Very good. Tell us about your ... What did you say name was that you like to be

called?

Christopher P.: Chris.

Jaime: Chris. Cause I know you as Marcelo as well.

Christopher P.: Yeah, that's for the Spanish people.

Jaime: The Spanish people call you Marcelo.

Christopher P.: [00:02:30] Yeah, that's my middle name.

Jaime: That's your middle name. So I could call you either or?

Christopher P.: You're Spanish so you can call me Marcelo.

Jaime: For this I'll say Chris.

Christopher P.: All right.

Jaime: Chris, what's your background? Tell us where you were born, and where your

parents are born.

Christopher P.: I was born in San Francisco, California, but I was raised in Pereira, Columbia. My

parents moved [00:03:00] back when I was like two years old and I did my high school, I finished high school there. My parents told me okay, you know what, we don't have enough money for you to continue a college in Columbia. So they

told me it was time for me to move back to the United States.

So I came to New York because I have my [00:03:30] uncle, I have family members that live here in New York. So I came in 2000. The idea of my dad was to join the Navy back then. But I came and my uncle, he used to work in a parking garage in the city. I forgot, like 34th street, [00:04:00] and he offered me a job, and I say, you know what 17 years old, about to turn 18, you know extra cash was nice. Before I was supposed to go to take English classes, because back then I didn't speak a word of English. As a matter of fact, the first word that I learned is, "What time are you picking it up?" That was in the parking garage. So I start working, I start making money, [00:04:30] and I never,

I always live with my parents, I never worked before, so it was nice to start

getting some cash in your pocket.

Jaime: This was around what age?

Christopher P.: 18 years old.

Jaime: Okay.

Christopher P.: So I start working. I work in the garage four years, and I been, I can say, like a

hustler since then because when I was there I knew that I don't want to be

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[00:05:00] a parking attendant for the rest of my life, even though I like it, it's fun. But I start asking all the customers, "What do you do? Do you have a job for me?" Until four years after, I had this guy he got a courier company. So he offered me a job as a truck driver. So I said, "Hell, let's do [00:05:30] it." I went as a truck driver for four years.

So, my first four years, parking attendant, another four years as a truck driver, and I was making good money, but I wasn't smart, my mom always told me, save, save, save. I never saved, and tickets are start coming in and many things that I started asking for money to pay those [00:06:00] taxes because I was like a self employer, so I have to pay a lot of taxes. After four years, so that was my eighth year then, I got another job that was in a hospital called Memorial [inaudible 00:06:16], as a maintenance. I was doing cleaning, cleaning floors and all that stuff.

At that point I decide to join the army. So [00:06:30] I joined the army. I think that was the best thing I could do in my life man, join the army. First of all serve the country, and it opened so many doors that you have no idea. As a matter of fact, thanks for the army I'm here right now and about to be a journeyman. I work in the hospital, I was doing [00:07:00] a lot of training in the army, and when I received a call from Helmets to Hard Hats to take the test, that was back in 2011. I received the call. The lady told me, "Listen, they taking the test." She call me on a Tuesday to take the test on Saturday.

Imagine from 2011, I finish high school in 1999, so it's [00:07:30] almost 12 years without touching a paper, a book, or nothing. So I just went online I did a little study, I went to take the test, I know I did good because a week after they call me. I received a letter saying, "Welcome to Local three." I went for the orientation, I went for the medical, [00:08:00] as I was going for the orientation to start college I received my orders to go overseas, to go to Afghanistan. So we have to stop all the process, I have to go. So I got my orders to go to Afghanistan, to get deployed, and we have to stop all the process [00:08:30] at that point. I went to the Drawing Board and explain to them what's going on, and they said, "Listen, no problem, we'll stop everything now. When you get back just bring your DD214 with you, the discharge form from the military." That's what I did.

I went to Texas for training for six months, and then I went to Afghanistan [00:09:00] for, I was in country for nine months as a electrician because I'm also a electrician in the army, that is my MOS. That's the job. I did a lot of electrical work in Afghanistan, I got some awards because I saved ... That's how they explain in the achievements that I saved money for the US Army, in one job that I did I saved them \$60,000 because [00:09:30] they usually give those jobs to contractors. Just imagine if a contractor here in the states is expensive, a job is expensive, imagine overseas, I don't know how many miles away is like three times the price.

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So I work in generators over there, it was a really nice experience man, really nice. I wouldn't want to go again. [00:10:00] I think that one time is enough, but it was really good. I came back in 2012, November 2012. I decide to have like three months vacation. In March I went back to the drawing board, I showed them my discharge form, and that's when I start my apprenticeship in March [00:10:30] 2013 up to now. I'm still going to school. I have one more semester to go, I'm graduating from college this June 16, and I'm happy. I'm really happy, excited to be a journeyman now.

Jaime:

It's a beautiful thing, I'm so happy for you too. I'm interested to know more about your military experience [00:11:00] but lets segway into, you know how you became an electrician, do you have any other family members inside the business?

Christopher P.:

No. I learned a lot from my dad, but he's not in the ... That was back in Columbia. He used to do a lot of electrical work and that's when I had the passion to, [inaudible 00:11:26] my passion to be an electrician. [00:11:30] I'm very handy, and that's where everything started. Because before I joined the union I was doing, I was an electrician in the army. Since I came to the United States in 2000, that's what I was looking for, to have a job like the one I have now, but as a [00:12:00] Latino, as somebody that didn't speak English back then, having no family or nobody in the unions it was impossible to get in. You have zero chances. So that's why when I became a soldier, I [00:12:30] have the opportunity to become a union member.

Jaime:

Chris, do you remember your first day of work? The first day you got on the job site?

Christopher P.:

Yes I do.

Jaime:

Tell us about that day.

Christopher P.:

Oh man, this guy, I love this guy, John Muscarella, love him. He was the foreman. I think he's retired now. That was on the Hilton Hotel [00:13:00] in 53rd between six and seven. The company was H & L Electric. I call, they give me the paperwork in the [inaudible 00:13:15] where they say, "Okay, you got to report to this address." I went there, I called the guy, John. Man he was a sweetheart since the first day. He went [00:13:30] through, you know, first day in the business you don't know what to expect, you kinda of scared because it's your first day, everything. But the transition was really, really nice. He was my foreman for four months. We were doing restaurant in the first [00:14:00] floor of the hotel. After that I spend almost a year in the same building with the number two back then in the restaurant. That was like the house electrician. So I

stayed there for over a year.

When you say number two you mean the sub foreman? :

Christopher Perez Page 4 of 17 Christopher P.: The sub foreman, yes.

Jaime: So the number one would be the General?

Christopher P.: The General yeah, John.

Jaime: John, and then the sub foreman was the one that stayed in the building?

Christopher P.: [00:14:30] Yes. What happened is, H & L, they also have a house electrician in

the hotel, Monday through Friday. So they bid on the job on the first floor for the restaurant, that's when I got there on my first day, and after that job finish, they moved all the men somewhere else, and I stayed in the hotel [00:15:00] with the other John, we stayed there for almost a year just doing little fixtures in

the rooms, every day. It was fun though.

Jaime: Did anything special happen that first day that really stands out in your mind?

Christopher P.: No, not really. He's trying to see where you're at, he asked me if I have any

experience. I explain to him my background a little bit. Then he start ...

[00:15:30] As the foremans, they try to see where you at, they try to give you a small task and see how you do, see how good you are, then they start giving you more and more, and more, and more depends how good you are, like I said. I guess I was good enough for him because I was ... [00:16:00] I also see a lot of apprentices coming in and leaving a couple days after, and I stayed there. Oh-

Jaime: People transitioning [crosstalk 00:16:12]

Christopher P.: Yes. It's one thing that I remember but it wasn't on the job itself, there was

another apprentice in there, and we start talking, the other apprentice was from the same city that I grow up in Columbia, [00:16:30] and it was so funny, we have a lot of friends in common in Columbia, he went to the same high school that I went in Columbia. We're still friends up to now, but I think it's really funny that in such a big city you go and find somebody, you work with somebody

doing the same thing, you know, so [00:17:00] I think that was nice.

Jaime: So it was a highlight to the beginning of your career?

Christopher P.: Correct.

Jaime: As you made the transition from building the restaurant to working in the hotel,

fixing things in the rooms, can you compare the two different types of work

early in your career?

Christopher P.: Yes. Downstairs in the restaurant that was a new construction, so right there

you started learning [00:17:30] from the basis, from the first day of starting a job, you know, how to rough out rooms, run EMT or whatever type of conduit we using, and in the rooms, they were already existing, we just have to move

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outlets from one wall to the other one, or [00:18:00] a fixture is not working, then we just have to replace the fixture. So it's a totally different bowl. Even though it's the same electrical work, but how you start building something comparing something that is already built and been there for years, and you just have to go there and just change something, and you see the wire is so old, it's different, it's different, [00:18:30] different, different.

Jaime: Marcelo can you explain the environment, so you're working in the restaurant

it's all new construction, now you're working inside finished hotel rooms, can you explain some of the things you have to do in order to continue working in that space, or what's happening around you as you work in the hotel rooms?

Christopher P.: All right. The hotel rooms, first of all you have to be [00:19:00] very careful with

your language, cause you are around customers all the time, guests from the hotel. So you have to be very careful what you are saying around them, not cursing, you know, and what else I can ... You know what I [00:19:30] did love that because you're always clean, I loved that, I was always clean because there's no need for you, in new construction you get dirty, every day you're looking nice, clean. Something that I didn't like is the start time was 8:00 because you can't start making noise before nine in the morning, so if you need to drill something you have to wait, [00:20:00] so for the contractor is a waste of money, if you start the men at seven you can't do anything until 8:30-9:00. So,

that part I didn't like. The clean part I like.

Jaime: You mean that you were clean?

Christopher P.: Yeah, I was clean. It's like everything is a finished product, you just have to do

small things here and there.

Jaime: So when you did finish a job, how did you have to leave the space?

Christopher P.: [00:20:30] What do you mean?

Jaime: Once you did your work, how did you have to leave ... Did somebody clean up

after you?

Christopher P.: No, no, in those cases is no labor, so we do have to clean everything. Every mess

not the mopping or wiping, but pick up all the dust that you make, the pieces of wire that you leave on the floor, and then you let the [00:21:00] cleaning staff know that, "Okay this room is done." So they come after us and sweep and dust and all that. But we do have to clean after. It's not like when you're doing a big construction we have laborers that they come right behind you and pick up all

the garbage and clean up everything.

Jaime: Thinking about the military and they work you did at the military in Afghanistan

as electrician, [00:21:30] and now transitioning into become an electrician in a

restaurant, and in a hotel, how did you feel about that change?

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Christopher P.:

Okay, when you overseas you have to be very creative because you don't have all the material, all the tools that you have here. Here you have to do something you just call in for the delivery, you order material [00:22:00] and the next day you have whatever you want. Some with tools, you need a special tool you call the shop, "Listen I need this." Most of the times you get it the next day. Over there you have to work with whatever you have. Over there like color coding is totally different and it's hard to keep it up because sometime you [00:22:30] don't have let's say black color, and you need a piece of black, but you have a white one. You have to use it, you have to make it work. They don't care if it's cold, they just need to make sure it's working. So, that part is very different. But like I said, in the military they help me to be creative, like-

Jaime: [00:23:00] Resourceful.

Christopher P.: Exactly, that is the word that I was looking for.

Jaime: MacGyver.

Christopher P.: Exactly. Yes because you have to make it work. Also, that make you feel good at

the end of the day, you're like, "Damn, I make it work." So it's good.

Jaime: You're proud of yourself.

Christopher P.: Exactly.

Jaime: I want to know more about how the military and your other jobs transitioned

into this job that you have now. Those experiences that you have in your

[00:23:30] other job, what did they bring to this job?

Christopher P.: The first thing that comes to my mind is appreciate what I have now. Seeing that

it's hard out there. First of all having all the medical, the wages that we make, the money that we make, retirement. [00:24:00] You can live good being an electrician in New York City. Being a union electrician in New York City. Having had none of that before I was making \$10 an hour, in the other one I was making like \$14-\$15 an hour, now that I have this I'm like, oh my god I feel so good I wake up every day thanking god, "Thank you for this opportunity." Like [00:24:30] I said before I also thank the army. I don't know why I didn't make that decision before, but it wasn't too late, I joined when I was 26 years old. I think that was the best, the job that I have now I don't change it for anything in

the world.

Jaime: Tell me about your typical day at the job now.

Christopher P.: Now I'm running a job for the first time. [00:25:00] I'm running a job. I have two

guys, two apprentices, well one is a M-helper, which is equal to an apprentice,

they're different divisions, and I have a apprentice.

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Jaime: What year is your apprentice?

Christopher P.:

Four year. And the helper is three year. Now it's a different ball game because I have to be on top of them. [00:25:30] I have to be on top of all the changes that they make in doing the job. All the new prints. I have to talk to the GC, the General Contractor all day everyday like, "Okay, what's the next step? What we're gonna do next?" Because it's two floors, and like [00:26:00] three different sections. So they want to finish some sections before the other ones, so you have to be paying attention all the time. "Okay, do I have everything before the carpenter close the walls?" I have to make sure that I order my material for the next day. I have to be sending progress report every week. I have to send the time every day. I have to order material every day. [00:26:30] So it's different, it's more responsibility. But I think I have had the opportunity, going back to the military, to have guys under me, my higher rank was a sergeant, so as a sergeant you get to have, your squad, your four or five guys that they have to report to you.

So I feel very confident that I'm doing a good job. [00:27:00] The guys that I'm working with they tell me they're happy. I don't know, I hope they are. Another thing, like I was telling you before, being on top of the other guys, sometimes you try to be a nice guy, but they try to take advantage of you, they say, "Well he's such a nice guy, I'm not going to [00:27:30] do anything today." So I have to, a couple talks with them, actually it's with one, the other one works, and I say, "Listen, we joke, we play, but there's a time for everything, we have to get the job done, and there's only us here. If you don't do anything, or you stay in one box splicing a couple wires for three or four hours, you're messing me up." [00:28:00] But in general it's good, the experience is really good. I hope I can keep being a foreman for the rest of my career, I like it. I like it. Even though it is stressful, but it's nice to get stuff accomplished and at the end of the job you can say, "You know what I ran the job, and everything's working because ..." The men and also you because you direct everything, are there for the right path.

Jaime:

[00:28:30] You're transitioning from a part where you were a worker, you had a squad in the military, now you became a worker, and you started learning about the trade, our trade, now you're transitioning into another phase of your career, which is like learning work. Can you tell me a little bit about those transitions and how you feel about that, or how it's happening in your mind?

Christopher P.:

[00:29:00] Okay. I'm gonna give you an example that perfectly work in this case, my wife she went and told me about it. This M-Helper that I'm telling you, we were having coffee, so the superintendent of the company he came around. We usually take 20-30 minutes coffee. So, we're having coffee, we start at 9:00 [00:29:30] at like 9:05-9:10 the super showed up, so at that point I haven't finished my breakfast, so I kinda hurry up, finish it. Went to talk to the super, and show him the progress of the job. My partner, he got up around 9:15, and he start working.

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So, [00:30:00] he always likes to, and I used to do it too, that's when my wife told me, to go to the bathroom on the owners time, let's put it that way. So he likes to go to the bathroom a lot, I don't blame him, I let him, I'm not saying anything. So he's um ... Okay the super left like half an hour after, we work, [00:30:30] we're working. I need to use the bathroom so I around 11:20, I use the bathroom, five ten minutes, I came back, as I'm coming back he goes and he tells me, "Oh, I got to use the bathroom." Now we about to go to lunch, it's like 10-15 minutes before lunch break. So as he tell me that I told him, "You know what, as a matter of fact, let's start [00:31:00] early lunch because the super cut the coffee break. So we gonna start early lunch." And he turn around and told me, "You know what, I'm just gonna wait until the lunch is finished to go to the bathroom."

So I'm like, "Wait, hold on. So you want to go to the bathroom, but now that I told you it's your time, you don't want to go to the bathroom? You want to go after you're finished lunch?" But I didn't say anything to them, I start thinking and I kind of laugh [00:31:30] by myself, and I went to tell my wife, and she go like, "Well it's something that you would do, that you do as an apprentice, and you told me." That's when you start noticing the difference to being a apprentice, or being a regular worker, to being a foreman, or a person in charge. Sometimes you have to think twice before you say something because a lot of [00:32:00] times you used to do the same thing. So you can't be selfish and okay now that you the boss you not gonna let the men do, for example, go to the bathroom on the boss time. So, that was funny.

Jaime:

So you're developing different sensitivities to things that you used to do, but now you have another paradigm that you have to look through. So now you're looking through [00:32:30] different eyes for instance, so you're seeing different things.

Christopher P.:

Yeah, but the military is way different than the civilian life. The military you giving a specialist or private, you're giving them an order. You're not asking them, you're not telling them, "Oh, can you do this?" No. "Go and do this." [00:33:00] It's a different ball game. You have more authority as a sergeant in the military than you do as a foreman in a job site. Because you can't treat your workers bad. In the military, actually you can, you can tell them, "You know what, start pushing right now, and start doing some [00:33:30] pushups." "Why?" Because, I don't know, anything, you just make something up.

Jaime:

That's interesting because historically unionism and workers and workers as union members, there's a sense of militanr-ism, or you know rank and file, that type of language, or those type of structures feel like a type of military. So what you're saying is that it doesn't really ... [00:34:00] What does match?

Christopher P.:

Match, like the chain of command, you see that a lot in the military, you see that a lot as a union electrician, you have to go first, if you have a straw, you have to go first through your straw, if the straw doesn't do anything you go to your foreman, and if the foreman doesn't do anything you call your super. In the

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military the same thing. You go to your first leader [00:34:30] in command, and if not, you go to the second one in rank, you use the chain of command a lot. As a matter of fact, if you have your platoon sergeant but you go straight to the first sergeant, the first thing he's gonna tell you, "You not suppose to talk to me. You're sergeant's supposed to come and address me for you." So you know right there is a chain of command.

Same thing I'm pretty [00:35:00] sure ... Some supers they like, "If anything, just give me a call and we talk about it." But usually you go to your foreman and say, "Listen need to take vacation." You don't go straight to the super and say, "Listen I need to take vacation." "Why you don't ask your foreman?" So that is the same thing. Now what doesn't match is the [00:35:30] way you treat people. Let's say for example, what happened with my apprentice, that he want to go to the bathroom but I told him now it's break time, now he don't want to go. If it was the military, you go now, or you don't go for the rest of the day, and it's an order. So that is different. Right here I can't tell the guy, "No, you have to go now, you can't go on regular time." You know?

Jaime: [00:36:00] What type of work do you feel you're most comfortable doing?

Where you most excel at?

Christopher P.: I can do a lot of things, and thank god I'm during my apprenticeship I working in

different fields. [00:36:30] I did good in all of the fields that I work. Like I was saying before I did street lighting, I work in transit, I helped to build a school in the Bronx from zero to the end, right before the kids start classes. I did work-

Jaime: Before you [00:37:00] go any further, how did that feel? Seeing it from the

beginning to end? Why is it so special?

Christopher P.: I think it's special because you know that you did something for that place to

become a reality. At the beginning when you start the deck, it's like, "Damn" you see the picture because most of the time you see the construction, you see the [00:37:30] picture outside the building where they have all the walls, all the permits. You see how it's gonna look one day when they're done. You look at it, and you look that whole inside you're like, "Damn, this is what we're gonna do?" Then during the process, every day, every day, every day something is new. You go on vacation and you come back for one week, and you see the place [00:38:00] totally different you're like, "Oh my god, it's unbelievable how different it looks just one week that I wasn't here." You know. The best part when you finishing, when you start putting this light bulb, or troubleshooting things, okay this doesn't work here, what's going on? You go back and forth. It

make you feel really, really nice when you see the final product.

Jaime: [00:38:30] What type of work is your favorite? Out of transit, you did-

Christopher P.: You know what, my favorite work, and it's because you make a lot of money, is

the street lighting, I also like it because you're outside, you don't have that 7-

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2:30 or 3:30 schedule. You have to ... [00:39:00] I don't like the, say you start at 7:00 and then you have coffee at 9:00-9:30 then you have lunch from 11:45-12:30, then at 2:00 you start packing up your tools and you leave at 2:15-2:20.

Jaime:

You don't like that schedule?

Christopher P.:

Not that I don't like the schedule, I don't like to be like everything step by step, okay 9:00, lunch. I like [00:39:30] more like, "Okay get it done and that's it, you can go home." That's how street lighting is, you take the truck in the morning, 6:00 in the morning, you go, you have breakfast, and then you go to whatever you have to go that day, and you get it done. So you have to do an entire corner, you work and you get it done. If you finish a little early you get to go home a little early but you already finish your job, you're still getting [00:40:00] your eight hours, or nine hours, or whatever hours you're supposed to, they gave you for that task. So I like that. I like more get it done, not like, ah, you sit down and

...

Jaime:

So you like the excitement of that pressure and of that-

Christopher P.:

And I like to be outside. I love to be outside. People say, what I'm doing not I have AC in the summer, and I have a heater [00:40:30] in the winter. Some people say, "You're crazy man. You want to be outside, now you have everything, you don't get cold, you don't get hot, you're good, you're set." "Yeah, but it's like tedious." The same thing over and over. Plus you make a lot of money working outside.

Jaime:

I know that's a great motivator.

Christopher P.:

Yeah that's a great motivation.

Jaime:

You spoke about creativity earlier, creatively [00:41:00] trying to figure things out. Is there other things in your job that feels creative in nature? Or artistic?

Christopher P.:

You know sometimes what we do, or what I'm doing, is not too much because there is an engineer, and an architect, and they tell, "Okay you got to put this light [00:41:30] in this wall, you're gonna put this switch in this wall, you're gonna put this light in this ceiling." So it's nothing really that you kinda like, you can put your touch. You just follow instructions basically, you just look at the print and just follow. They want a switch at this distance, and you go and measure it and put it on. So it's not too much creative. [00:42:00] Maybe when

...

You know when I see a little creation, and I like to do, when you do a panel, then you shape all your wires really nice, and then you take a picture, I'm pretty sure you've seen. And you take a picture of your final job and you're like, "Oh my god that looks nice." Or when you do a pull box right before you go inside a panel, and you shape all your wires really nice, and you used tie wraps, and you

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make everything [00:42:30] looks beautiful. All the wire nuts trying to line it up. That I seen it, not a creative because you're not creating anything, but it's kind of artistic, because you make something nice for the eye to look at. "Oh my god that looks nice."

Jaime: It's aesthetically pleasing.

Christopher P.: Exactly, that is.

Jaime: Very nice, okay. Have [00:43:00] you ever passed a tool down to someone? Or

had a tool passed down to you?

Christopher P.: Like somebody gave me something? Yes. In the first, no, many times they give

me tools, like, "Here you go kid, have this." Or maybe I didn't have it and I need it, "Can I borrow your screwdriver?" "Sure, you know what, you can keep it."

[00:43:30] So I have a few.

Jaime: Have you practiced that with your apprentices?

Christopher P.: No, I ... Oh, as a matter of fact, yes, the other day I have one of my apprentices

and he didn't have a pair of dikes.

Jaime: What are dikes?

Christopher P.: Side cutters, like pliers kind of thing. Just to cut. That afternoon I went and I

ordered, I mean, I didn't pay for it, but [00:44:00] I placed an order, I ordered it from the shop, and they send me a brand new one, so I gave it to him the next day when I got it. He was really excited, "Oh my god I never had a dykes before."

He was really, really excited about it, so that feels good though.

Jaime: It feels good-

Christopher P.: Even though it didn't came out of my pocket, but you know, I did the action.

Jaime: How did it feel for you receiving tools?

Christopher P.: It was really nice like, "Are you sure you want to give it to me?" "Sure, yeah. You

can have it." [00:44:30] It's good. It's kind of like appreciation, like they appreciate what you do, or the way you are, I guess, that's the way I see it.

Jaime: This type of relationship that you speak about where people give you things,

and you give things to people, how would you classify that kind of relationship when you're working with another journeyman or your learning process,

because we have to learn from the journeyman [00:45:00] and women. Can you explain a little bit about that process, and how you get to learn from these

people?

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Christopher P.:

Well I've been known for ask so many questions, and every time when I work with somebody, like a journeyman, or even when I work with another apprentice, or another of my same, even when I work with an apprentice I always think that [00:45:30] you learn from, it can be a first year apprentice, always you're gonna learn something. I ask a lot of questions. I think that is very helpful and people appreciate that because in this business the idea is to teach the apprentices coming up [00:46:00] because like everybody said, that is our future. When you retire, they are the ones gonna pay your benefits or your retirement. So, it's sad when you're working and you have an apprentice and he is on the phone all the time. That really like-

Jaime:

Bothers you.

Christopher P.:

... Bothers me, and I tell them, "Bro listen, you need [00:46:30] to learn this. This is gonna be your future. Oh at least pretend you're kind of paying attention. Don't be like in the other corner on your phone. That's not nice. That's not right." So when I was going on my apprenticeship, so now when I see another mechanic I give them the respect, and I ask questions because [00:47:00] that's how you learn. You ask questions, listen like 80-90% of the times something that I ask, it came after that I have to do it by myself and I'm, "Oh wait, he explained to me how to do it."

Like the other day I was with my dad in my house so I learned when I was working in the subway how to bend a PVC pipe. [00:47:30] My dad is 60 something years old, and he's very knowledgeable, and I came with the [inaudible 00:47:41] for the two wedge racks at the end of the PVC pipe and heat it at where you want to bend it so the air doesn't come out, and he was like, "Oh my god." I go back to him, "You see dad, there's still things that I know that you don't know." That was a good feeling. [00:48:00] It's nice when you start learning things then you apply those things that you learn. It was really cool.

Jaime:

I know that feeling, I've had that with my father as well, and I felt that he was like proud of me, you know?

Christopher P.:

Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

Jaime:

He's so good at things, and he was proud of me. So it's interesting that you've gone through that too.

You have a great energy Chris, I know a lot of people tell you that. How does that ... The relationship, [00:48:30] I know it has something to do with the relationships at work, and how much people give to you. Can you explain how that happens?

Christopher P.:

Man, you know what, since I start I never have a problem with anybody. I feel the love, thank god, from every single journeyman, apprentice, that I work with,

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everyone. I never have somebody that, "Ah, this guy, ah." Because I always [00:49:00] go with a good attitude even though some days it's not your day, but you kinda leave those problems to the side and you know what this is my job, that's where I'm making money, so you know, go with the best attitude and if you comfortable with the other journeyman, you tell them, "Listen, today is not a good day, I feel kind of down. I'm sorry if I'm not giving my 100%, [00:49:30] but I have problems." And people understand, but if you go to the job site and you just go in the corner and don't do anything, they gonna be like, "Oh dude, look at this guy." So I always got that, thank god I always was a good feeling.

Jaime: How do you deal with a difficult personalities?

Christopher P.: I'm trying to make a joke out of everything. I'm just like, I don't care. [00:50:00]

If you just want to be a douche, it's up to you. I just keep going, and that's it.

Jaime: Is there anything you would change about your job? Or have you seen a change

that's happening on the job that you like or dislike?

Christopher P.: Like on my job in general as an electrician? Or when I'm working-

Jaime: Whatever you think of.

Christopher P.: You [00:50:30] know it's things that maybe I never got to feel it before, but I

heard from a lot of people, things change, and explain how they used to be, but

it's not something like, one thing-

Jaime: Like a pinpoint.

Christopher P.: Exactly. There's things that I would like to change, [00:51:00] but I don't know, I

can't explain to you like, "Okay this is what I want to change."

Jaime: Right, okay. Does your work life ever merge with your home or your personal

life?

Christopher P.: No, not really. Not really, I try to ... You know what, maybe because I haven't

been too much let's say maybe a big [00:51:30] foreman, having all the stress, phone calls, emails, or its 8-9pm, and they're still getting emails, things that they have to change. Maybe that change a little bit, now at this point I just go home and live my life, and the next day come. Whereas, I'm driving to work, you start thinking, "Okay, what [00:52:00] are we gonna do to day? What's the plan for

today?" But not while I'm home. When I'm home, I'm home.

Jaime: Right. What about your, different things like relationships with co-workers, does

that ever translate into your home life, or in your personal life?

Christopher P.: I become very good friends, so you know, doing this, and it's nice to have new

friends, and it's nice when you [00:52:30] share experience from work with

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friends. It's funny because everybody do it, whatever field they work in. Like my wife, I'm gonna say this, and this always is the funniest thing, my wife is a speech therapist, and you're gonna know my accent, and she's trying to work with my accent reduction and my speech. [00:53:00] Many, many, many years, but I'm like, "Don't even bother. I speak how I speak, and that's it."

Jaime:

Yeah.

Christopher P.:

But I see her, like when she met with another speech therapist, they start talking in some weird language and I don't even bother, I just turn around and go somewhere else, because ... And they feel happy they're, "Oh my god, you know I have this patient and he [00:53:30] couldn't swallow, and he couldn't eat." And they come with different terms and I'm like, "What the hell are you talking about?" But she notice the same thing when I'm talking to another friend, another electrician, and we start talking about panels, and about wire nuts, and about wire size, and about different things, connectors, or different things. She go like, "What are you talking about?" Or service, you know. So it's the same [00:54:00] exactly thing, but in a-

Jaime:

Your language.

Christopher P.:

Exactly. So it's nice when you have friends that you guys do the same thing, it's really good.

Jaime:

I know that your wife has been working with you with this accent reduction, but you know I've heard you say this joke, or somebody say this joke, that your wife must be the worst speech-

Christopher P.:

Speech, yeah. So I have my friend, when I was working in the school, [00:54:30] PS56, I remember, in the Bronx, so I was there for over a year. I became a good friend with this mechanic, his name is Blazer. We were joking every day, joking, we had so much fun at work, so one day we're talking and he asked me, "So what does your wife do?" So I go ... Oh, we were in coffee time. [00:55:00] So ten men in the [inaudible 00:55:01] shanty sitting down, so I say, "Oh, she's a speech therapist." "Oh my god bro, she's got to be the worst speech therapist ever." Everybody start cracking up. It was the funniest thing.

So I go back home and I told my wife, and she got so mad. Oh my god. "You see, that what I was trying to teach you, you don't let me teach you. Now what [00:55:30] people is gonna think that I'm the worst speech therapist, that's not nice." And she [inaudible 00:55:35] over, and over, and over, so that's the joke all the time when I go to a new job site. That's one thing, when you meet new people, you always start talking about where you live, you married, you have kids, then you go, "What do your wife do?" And every time when I gonna say this, I'm just start laughing and I say, "Bro, [00:56:00] I know what you're gonna say." That comes always to a conversation.

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Jaime: It's always like an icebreaker.

Christopher P.: Exactly, exactly.

Jaime: That was very endearing, thank you for that. In the future, do you think that

your children, or members of your community are gonna do the same kind of

work you're doing?

Christopher P.: I really don't know. My wife has a master's degree, and like I said before,

[00:56:30] I'm gonna have my associate in a couple weeks, and I've been talking to my wife, and actually she's the one been pushing it for me to keep going with my education, I would like to be an electrical engineer, so what she's saying is we want our kids to be a college graduate. In order for that, [00:57:00] we have to be college graduate too. So we can be an example for them, so I don't know, maybe they like it, and they want to become an electrician, why not, but if they can be an engineer, like be more than that, like an engineer or, I don't know, an astronaut, or whatever, whatever they want to be [00:57:30] I'm just gonna

support them in whatever they want to do.

Jaime: Nice. What advice would you give someone starting out in your field today?

Christopher P.: One thing that I always tell everyone, do not stay in the same chapter in your

apprenticeship. I think that's the worst thing that you can do. I have the experience to work in four different, [00:58:00] three, four different shops. In every shop I learn something different, and I think that's the best. I've seen some people being in the same shop, doing the same type of work for the whole apprenticeship, and they don't know there is so many different fields in the electrical industry, that as [00:58:30] the much that you know the better.

Because you never know, the day after tomorrow that shop they go and close, and they lay you off. You gonna go to another shop that do something totally different, you're gonna be lost. That's one advice that I always give them, "Listen, as soon as you get the year, go call the joint board, [00:59:00] ask for a rotation." Because that happens to me the first year in H & L, I thought that was, "Oh my god this is the best shop." Because you don't have experience in another shop, so you think whatever you're living that point is the best. You don't know better, you be like, "Oh my god I'm in the best shop." But you're not.

There's so many fields, there's so many shops that you can experience different things. Then when you become a journeyman, then you can make [00:59:30] a decision, "Okay you know what, I think I like this shop better. Or I like this type of work better." Then you can start taking more classes, let's say fiber, you like how to splice fiber. Then you can just take classes and become good at it, then you can go work for a fiber shop.

So that's one, and the other [01:00:00] one is to pay attention, to learn. Show that you care about what you're doing. Show your journeyman, "Listen, I want

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to learn, can you explain to me, can you show me what you just did? Why you splice the black with the black? Why you didn't splice the black with the red?" Different things, you just ask, ask, ask questions, that's how you learn.

Jaime: One piece of advice that [01:00:30] I was thinking about this morning, I was like

man, you know, you always think about a great job, right? Then you always think about a crappy job, and one thing that they always told me was, Every

good job must come to an end, and every bad job comes to an end."

Christopher P.: Yep.

Jaime: If you're on a bad one, you just got to wait for the day.

Christopher P.: Wait for the day.

Jaime: When you're on a really good one, you have to enjoy every day.

Christopher P.: Every day.

Jaime: Because it's gonna finish.

Christopher P.: Yep, unfortunately it's life.

Jaime: Unfortunately it's life, yes I agree with you. Do you feel that electricians are

underpaid, [01:01:00] fairly paid, or overpaid? And why?

Christopher P.: I think this one we are fairly paid. We work, it's a dangerous job, we dealing with

live electricity every day, and if you not be careful in what you're doing you can die. So, [01:01:30] I think we are fairly paid. I like our package as electricians,

you know the retirement, and what you take home. I think it's good.

Jaime: The last question I have for you Chris is, what inspires you?

Christopher P.: My dad. It's nice to see he feels so proud of me. [01:02:00] That inspire me.

Jaime: Thank you Chris. Is there anything else that you want to add?

Christopher P.: No.

Jaime: Beautiful.

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